

Remarks at a Dinner Honoring Senator David Pryor in Little Rock,
Arkansas
December 9, 1995

Thank you very much, Jimmie Lou. I will treasure this always. I wish you could have gotten me a ballot of a precinct that I carried. *[Laughter]* You know, I ran in Sebastian County a zillion times, and I started in 1974. It took me until 1990, where I finally carried it. *[Laughter]* But thanks to some of you in this room, it finally happened. I thank you very much. I thank you, Jimmie Lou Fisher, for being my dear friend and for introducing me in October of 1991 on the steps of the Old State Capitol. You seem to bring good luck to me and to everyone else whom you touch.

I thank Maurice Mitchell and Skip Rutherford and everyone else who had anything to do with this dinner tonight. Chairman Gibson; my dear friend Mack McLarty, who came out with me tonight and who has done a wonderful job on all of our behalfs in Washington. I'm so grateful to him for being there with me these last 3 years. To Congresswoman Blanche Lambert Lincoln; if there is a living soul in this country who can change a deer season, it's her. *[Laughter]* I've gotten to where when she starts coming at me, I just say yes before she ever says anything. It saves a lot of time and a lot of energy, always the same result. *[Laughter]*

Senator Bumpers, you do not have to get off the back door tomorrow. *[Laughter]* But however, after a few of those jokes tonight, I hope you won't mind if I ask you to board by the back door. *[Laughter]*

I want to say that I am profoundly grateful to Dale Bumpers for what he's done for our State and what he's done for our Nation and for the kind of voice that he's been in the United States Senate for all of these 18 years or 22 years or however long he's been there—since—it seemed like before I could vote—*[laughter]*—but never more than the last 2 years when he has found that soaring eloquence in the service of views that seemed to be fading from fashion until the last few months. And it's because people like Dale Bumpers speak up in the lean times as well as the good ones that this country stays on the path to progress and keeps its common sense about it, and I'm

very grateful to him, and all of you should be as well.

So, Governor Tucker, let me say I hope you pass your bond issue, and I hope you pass a constitution. He was too gracious to say it, but when he was reeling off all of the names of the Governors that tried to get a new constitution, he could have said, had he been less gracious, that we all failed. *[Laughter]* But that doesn't mean we don't need one. And I am especially grateful to you for taking on a lot of tough issues that are often thankless because you know that 10 or 20 or 30 years from now, if we do these things, people will look back and say, "Thank you very much. It might not have been popular at the time and it certainly wasn't easy at the time, but it was the right thing to do." And that's the kind of Governor you've been, and I am very grateful to you for it.

To Senator Pryor and Barbara and all of the Pryor family, let me say I am very honored to be here tonight. Hillary wishes she could be here. She called David; they had a long conversation this morning. Neither one of them would tell me everything they discussed. But she loves you very much, as you know, and wishes that she could be here with you. But our daughter is engaged in an activity tonight that required her presence in Washington, and I know you understand that. But she and I feel a special debt to you and a special bond.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've got to be honest with you: I'm kind of like Dale. This is a night I hoped would never come. I'm glad you showed up, and I thank you for your devotion to the Democratic Party and to Dale Bumpers and to Jim Guy Tucker and to our Congressman and our Congresswoman and especially to Senator Pryor. But I hoped that this night would never come.

You know how there are just things in life you assume would go on forever? I just assumed David Pryor's career in the Senate would go on forever. I thought long after I retired from the White House I would be back here with you, you know, wearing his buttons and having his bumper sticker on my car. *[Laughter]* I fig-

ured I would be writing him someday, asking him to help me with my Social Security check. I just thought it would go on forever. [Laughter]

So today my whole life has been parading before me. I flew into Fayetteville and went to the ballgame, and then I came down here, and I got to see the Ozarks, and I got to see the river valley that I love so well, and I got to relive my whole life with David Pryor. The first time I ever met David Pryor, I remember it just like it was yesterday, he was walking down the street in some small town in south Arkansas, asking people to vote for him for Congress. And I was not quite 20 years old. And I thought he was really something. It turned out I was right; he was really something.

I remember once when I was a senior in college, and he and Barbara were standing outside a restaurant in Washington, DC, one night, and I was just walking down the street and I ran into them. And he was a Congressman, and I was a college student. They invited me in to sit down and have a bite with them and just talk. And I couldn't believe it. There was nothing in it for them, and it was a night they could be alone and away from politics and away from the pressures of the job. It probably didn't mean much to him, but I've never forgotten it after all of these years.

I remember when he suffered the only defeat he ever endured in 1972, the incredible dignity and grace and generosity with which he bore it. It was a lesson that I had occasion to apply later on—[laughter]—more than once, I might add, but one I never forgot.

I remember when he ran for Governor in 1974, as Jimmie Lou said when I ran for Congress, what a tough time it was, how hard it was to keep people focused on the fundamental goodness of our way of doing public business and the need to keep pushing forward because we had such a terrible recession. I remember sitting in the back of the Governor's limousine in 1978, when I was attorney general and he was Governor, and he told me he was going to run for Senator, and he suggested I might run for Governor.

And he said—I never will forget this—he said, "You know, as young as you are, you might even make a career of it. You might survive 10 or 12 years." [Laughter] Well, I wanted to be Governor, but I thought he had a screw loose. It turned out he was right about that. That race in 1978 gave him a chance to be

a Senator, gave Jim Guy Tucker a chance to be a Governor and, I might add, a great Governor. It gave Ray Thornton a chance to be the president of both of our great, big universities and go on to—come back to Congress and help us all stand against the floodtide up there. It was an interesting year.

One of my great joys all during the decade of the 1980's was going to these events that David and Dale and I used to go to and tell all of our bad jokes over and over again, to see whether we could still get a laugh, knowing all of the time that we were able to do something here, to keep a certain spirit, a certain sense of togetherness, a certain sense of being willing to make a future that a lot of our fellow Americans were having a hard time holding on to—thanks in no small measure to David Pryor.

But the thing I remember most vividly tonight was in the cold, cold winter of 1991 and 1992 in New Hampshire, when our passion for a new future ran into the politics of personal destruction, and everybody said our campaign was over. David Pryor and Barbara Pryor were there day-in and day-out, walking in the snow, knocking on the doors, talking to people about what this country could be and what it ought to be and what kind of direction we ought to have in Washington. And as long as I live, I will never forget. They did not have to be there, but they were, and it made all the difference.

You know, our whole country's existence has basically had three great strands: our love of liberty, our belief in progress, and our struggle to find common ground amid all of our differences. I can think of no public official in my lifetime I have ever met from any place who better embodied all three of those things and who always knew that unless we could find common ground through decency and standing up for the values that made this country great, it would in the end not be possible to preserve progress or even liberty.

In Washington today we are having the debate of the century about what kind of people we are and what kind of future we're going to have, what our obligations to each other are, and whether we really believe in opportunity for all and responsibility from all, whether we really believe we have an obligation to help families stay together and to take care of our parents when they're sick and our children when they're growing up, whether we really believe that we are, as our motto says, from many one.

David Pryor is the embodiment of what I want our country to keep at and to become and to do. Senator Bumpers quoted de Tocqueville. He said a long time ago that this is a great country. "America is great," he said, "because America is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, she will no longer be great." David Pryor has been a great public servant because he is fundamentally good.

William Wordsworth said the last best hope of a good man's life are the little, unremembered acts of kindness and love. David

Pryor, over more than 30 years, every person in this room and every person in our State has been embraced by your kindness and love, and we thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:25 p.m. in Governor's Hall II at the Statehouse Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Jimmie Lou Fisher, Arkansas State treasurer; Maurice Mitchell, attorney in Little Rock; Skip Rutherford, former State Democratic chair; and Bynum Gibson, State Democratic chair.

Teleconference Remarks to the Florida State Democratic Convention December 10, 1995

The President. Thank you. Thank you for that warm and rousing welcome. I've enjoyed listening through my earphone here to what's going on down there. I see that Senator Dodd has almost lost his voice in the enthusiasm and so has your State party chair, Terry Brady. But I want to thank both of them for their leadership and for what they have done and for stirring everybody up and getting you excited over the election we're about to have and the stakes there.

I want to say hello to attorney general Bob Butterworth. I'd also like to send kind greetings to all of my friends down there, especially to Governor Chiles, Lieutenant Governor MacKay, Senator Bob Graham.

I am very pleased to be able to speak with you today at this very important convention. As we move into the Presidential campaign season, you know, I can't help but recall that it was almost 4 years ago to the day that Florida and the Florida Democrats, at this meeting, put our campaign on the map when you helped me to win a decisive straw poll victory on December 15th, 1991. I remember that day so well, for that victory convinced me that the American people were serious about wanting new leadership in Washington and a new direction for our country.

You know, I have many things I want to say, but the most important thing I can do is to say a simple thank you. Thank you for helping me and Al Gore to the White House, to give us a chance to advance the economy and to

honor the values that are critical to moving our country forward into the 21st century. So, even though we have to talk a lot today about the future, let me say one more time: Thank you for your faith in me and in Vice President Gore; thank you for your support for these past 3 years.

Today, my fellow Americans, I come to you with a simple and straightforward message. We live in a great country in a time of very great change. We are moving forward from the industrial age to an age of technology. We are moving away from the cold-war era into the era of the global village. We know that. I ran for President to change things in this country, to take advantage of this time of absolutely enormous, enormous possibility so that we could make the most of the lives of every American and give all Americans back their future and so that we would make sure that our country would still be able to lead the world toward peace and freedom and prosperity. We have done that.

Our country is in better shape today than it was 3 years ago. Our economy is stronger, we are coming back to our basic values, and we are leading the world toward peace. But to continue to be true to those values, we have to have a clear vision of the future, and we have to stick with it. You know that.

When I ran for President in 1992, I was committed to restoring the American dream for all our people and to make absolutely sure that America would go into the next century still the most powerful country in the world, the